

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE

UTILITY PATENT APPLICATION FOR:

DENTAL LIGHT GUIDE

Inventors:

John WEST

and

Scott GANAJA

DENTAL LIGHT GUIDE

REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application Number 60/427,210, filed November 19, 2002, which is hereby incorporated by reference.

FIELD OF INVENTION

This invention relates to light guides and light-curing apparatus for producing a beam of light for photo-initiating a light curing dental composition. In particular, the present invention is a device that attaches to a Light Emitting Diode (LED) light source to transmit and distribute light energy to the surface or internal chamber of a tooth for the purpose of photo-initiation of light curing resins and dental tooth whitening.

BACKGROUND

Dentistry relies on light curing resins as sealants, adhesives, and as filler material for filling dental cavities. Light curing material is cured by exposure to radiant energy in spectral range tailored to the composition of the material. A light-curing unit containing a reflector lamp is used to irradiate the light curing material by directing light from the reflector lamp through a light guide positioned with its distal end adjacent to the light curing material to be cured. The light guide functions to channel the light to the material at the site of the dental restoration.

The physics of the transmission of light through a light conductor is well known. Practical factors and physical limitations of both doctor and patient often dictate the design of the light guides and light-curing units used in modern dentistry. The need for accessibility and maneuverability within the oral cavity of a patient requires the light guide to have a curved end section. Aside from these practical considerations attention must also be given to maximizing the transmission of light from the light source.

Conventional light guides typically comprise a solid conductor of either glass or plastic, or is composed of a fiber optic conductor consisting of multiple strands of glass fiber held together as a flexible bundle or fused into a solid rod of individual fibers. Conventional light guides are not as efficient as the instantly disclosed light guide as they typically produce

high angle light that results in loss of light energy due to multiple reflections and the escape of light from the apparatus.

Light sources used for the purpose of photo-initiation of light curing resins and dental tooth whitening fall into two major categories. Light sources such as tungsten halogen, metal halide, and xenon all produce white light that is filtered to transmit only visible light within the general spectral range of 380-520 nanometers. Light sources such as laser and light emitting diode produce visible light which is closely matched to the photo-initiators used in light curing resins and activators found in dental tooth whitening formulations.

Light sources such as tungsten halogen, metal halide, and xenon are not very efficient at producing light energy within the spectral range useful for dental photo-polymerization and tooth whitening. The energy produced by these light sources in the form of ultraviolet and infrared is not used in the dental application. Light sources such as laser and LED that produce visible blue light with spectral output closely matching the photo-initiators used in dental resins and the activators found in dental tooth whitening formulations are much more efficient and produce less heat in the form of infrared wavelengths. Light emitting diodes last for thousands of hours with no degradation in light output eliminating the need to change lamps.

Prior use of Light Emitting Diodes for dental light sources relied on multiple LED's placed in arrays to generate enough power to be practical for dental curing. This is expensive and also increases the size of the device. Recent advancements in LED semiconductor technology have resulted in the introduction of a single blue LED that emits radiometric power levels sufficient to allow the rapid photo-polymerization of light curing resins and for use in dental tooth whitening. It is recognized that continued advancements in LED semiconductor technology will result in the use of different semiconductor substrate materials to alter the color spectra as well as increase radiometric power for single LED devices.

The domed lens cover used as part of the construction of these mass-produced LED's is designed so that light is visible from 360 degrees around the device. This is because the typical application for these devices are indicator lights such as traffic signal lights, automotive brake and signal lights, and signage. The present invention redirects the light energy emitted from the LED and focuses it toward the distal end of the invention in an

efficient manner resulting in higher energy levels than possible with a traditional external reflector.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention provides a dental light guide comprising an entrance area, a lens, at least one reflector, a light pipe and an exit area.

The present invention also provides a dental light guide comprising an entrance area, a lens, at least one reflector, a light pipe and an exit area and wherein the dental light guide is comprised of injection molded acrylic, glass or plastic.

The present invention also provides multi-piece dental light guide comprising an entrance area, at least one reflector, and lens all functionally attached to an image conduit by a metal sleeve.

Additionally, the present invention provides a multi-piece dental light guide comprising an entrance area, at least one reflector, and lens all functionally attached to an image conduit by a metal sleeve and wherein the entrance area, at least one reflector and lens are molded in a single glass part.

The present invention further provides an apparatus for the purpose of providing light for the photo-initiation of light curing resins, comprising a light source and a light guide for transmitting reflected light from said light source as a concentrated, high-intensity beam, said light comprising an entrance area, a lens, at least one reflector, a light pipe and an exit area.

The present invention further provides an apparatus for the purpose of providing light for the photo-initiation of light curing resins, comprising a light source and a light guide for transmitting reflected light from said light source, said light comprising an entrance area, a lens, at least one reflector, a light pipe and an exit area wherein the light source is LED, tungsten halogen, metal halide, or xenon.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

FIG. 1 illustrates a conventional light guide;

FIG. 2 illustrates another conventional light guide;

FIG. 3 illustrates an embodiment of the instant invention;

FIG. 4 illustrates the inefficiencies of flat-ended light guides;

FIG. 5 illustrates the inefficiencies of light guides without total internal reflection;

FIG. 6 illustrates the efficiency of an embodiment of the instant invention;

FIG. 7 illustrates a further embodiment of the instant invention;

FIG. 8 illustrates an additional embodiment of the instant invention;

FIG. 9 illustrates another further embodiment of the instant invention;

FIG. 10 is a chart illustrating that light intensity (mW/cm^2) disperses rapidly with distance from these light sources;

FIG. 11 demonstrates the effect of light collimation with an embodiment of the instant invention on a composite (Heliomolar) that is hard to cure;

FIG. 12 is a photograph illustrating a curing distance of 6mm.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Unless defined otherwise, all technical and scientific terms used herein have the same meaning as commonly understood by one of ordinary skill in the art to which this invention belongs. Although any methods and materials similar or equivalent to those described herein can be used in the practice or testing of the present invention, the preferred methods and materials are described.

The instantly disclosed invention is the current industry standard light curing tip for dental composites. It was originally based on receiving light from a halogen, xenon, or other

similar light source. LED light sources have different requirements, however. First, the light emitter is small. This allows the proximal end of the light guide to be very close to the emitter and even envelop the source. Secondly, LED's emit very little heat forward (although they do emit heat rearwards). This allows the use of transparent plastics for construction of the light guide as well as single or multiple glass elements. Molded plastics and glass allow for much more complex shapes giving more optical design freedom. Finally, although LED's are efficient they currently do not provide as much total light as traditional light sources. This requires that the light guide be very efficient. Current light sources can use less efficient tips because they have surplus power.

The instant invention is designed to work with single or multiple LED emitters with or without domed lens covers to control beam geometry. Light sources used for dental curing and whitening procedures traditionally delivered light energy to the tooth through a rigid light guide commonly known as fused glass or image conduit constructed of thousands of individual fiber optic strands. Single plastic rods and glass-clad rods have also been used. These rigid light guides connect to the light source and light enters into the proximal end and is delivered at the distal end. The light travels through the rigid light guide and exits the distal end at approximately the same angle as it entered. More recently, LED light sources have been introduced where the emitter, covered by a lens cap, is placed in close proximity to the tooth. An external reflector is used to focus the light to the target area in front of the light source.

Most first-generation LED curing devices use flat proximal end tips made from fused glass (see fig. 1). A metallic or metal-coated plastic reflector is used to reflect light forward into the light guide (see fig. 2). Metal reflectors are typically 60-90% efficient compared to acrylic total internal reflection type reflectors which can be over 96% efficient.

One embodiment of the instant invention consists of five basic features: the entrance area, the reflector, the lens, the light pipe, and the exit area. In a one-piece molded tip, all five features are molded together. See Figure 7.

An alternate embodiment involves the use of a multi-piece tip. In this particular embodiment the pieces are the TIR reflector, the sleeve, and the image conduit. See Figure 8.

The first piece, the TIR reflector, comprises three features including the entrance area, the reflector, and the lens. These features are molded into a single glass part in the preferred

embodiment. The geometry and function of these three features is the same as in the one-piece version.

The second piece is a metal sleeve that is used to connect the TIR reflector to the image conduit. An adhesive may be used to secure in the connection.

The third piece, the image conduit, provides a means to transmit the light from the TIR reflector to the exit area, similar in purpose to the light pipe portion of the molded one-piece tip. Image conduit is typically constructed of small glass rods (fiber optics) fused together to form a large bundle (conduit). Image conduit is more efficient at transmitting light around a bend than a simple light pipe. Because the conduit is designed to transmit an image, the pattern of light at its entrance is virtually the same as the light pattern at the exit. The light intensity at the exit area is higher and the light distribution is more uniform compared to a molded light pipe.

Another alternate design involves the same features and parts as the above described three piece tip with slightly altered geometry. The larger reflector area allows more light to be directed into the image conduit. This version is more difficult to manufacture. See Figure 9.

Figures 4 - 9 illustrate additional embodiments of the instant invention.

High angle light is light that forms a large angle to the axis of the light guide. High angle light is not as useful as low angle light for two reasons. First, high angle light hits the walls more frequently resulting in higher losses (light loses energy every time that it is reflected). Secondly, high angle light escapes out of the distal end at high angles, resulting in a wider pattern (cone of light). This results in a more rapid reduction of intensity the further away from the tip the measurement is taken. See Figure 4.

LED enveloped by light guide. For reference only. More efficient. Light escapes around the sides of the light guide because it does not internally reflect (it refracts). No total internal reflection (TIR). Most of the light is high angle light. See Figure 5.

Combination of LED enveloped by light guide, molded-in TIR reflector, and molded-in lens. This preferred embodiment is very efficient. Light is split into two paths. The outer light is directed onto the TIR reflector and reflects forward at a relatively low angle. The

inner light rays are refracted into the tip at a lower angle than that of a flat tip. After designing this tip, a flashlight lens was discovered that uses acrylic molded-in TIR reflector and lens. Similar to the instant invention except that the instant invention focuses light into and through the tip compared to emitting light out into the air for illumination. The advantages over current tips is more efficient light transfer and much lower manufacturing cost. See Figure 6.

The tip consists of five basic features. The entrance area, the reflector, the lens, the light pipe, and the exit area. In a one-piece molded tip, all five features are molded together. See Figure 7.

The first alternate embodiment involves the use of a three-piece tip. The three pieces are the TIR reflector, the sleeve, and the image conduit. See figure 8.

The first piece, the TIR reflector, comprises three features including the entrance area, the reflector, and the lens. These features are molded into a single glass part in the preferred embodiment. The geometry and function of these three features is the same as in the one-piece version.

The second piece is metal sleeve that is used to connect the TIR reflector to the image conduit. Adhesive is also involved in the connection.

The third piece, the image conduit, provides a means to transmit the light from the TIR reflector to the exit area, similar in purpose to the light pipe portion of the molded one-piece tip. Image conduit is typically constructed of small glass rods (fiberoptics) fused together to form a large bundle (conduit). Image conduit is more efficient at transmitting light around a bend than a simple light pipe. Because the conduit is designed to transmit an image, the pattern of light at its entrance is virtually the same as the light pattern at the exit. The light intensity at the exit area is higher and the light distribution is more uniform compared to a molded light pipe.

A second alternate design involves the same features and parts with slightly altered geometry. The larger reflector area allows more light to be directed into the image conduit. This version is more difficult to manufacture. See Figure 9. Both three-piece tip designs provide more light in a more uniform pattern, but are more expensive to manufacture compared to the one-piece version.

Date	Time	Text	uWatt	uWatt/cm^2	mW/cm2	peak at	peak val	FWHM
		Calibration 8-25-03	8437	600		93.71	350.9	
		Allegro 8mm Acrylic 8-25-03	624585	451		20874.39	26.56	
		Allegro 8mm Acrylic 8-25-03	627734	451		21121.49	26.35	
		Allegro .407 TIR	515152	451		16968.6	26.92	
		SF No Filter 8.29	237807	468		1382.95	318.51	
		optilux 501 8mm turbo	433665	476		5654.4	85.75	
		sapphire 9mm	867759	468		9827.2	107.6	
		sapphire 9mm	1098140	468		12201.63	109.2	
11/13/2003	12:19:04 PM	Allegro 0mm Cosine	209514	1753860	1754	438.69	67795.12	22.35
11/13/2003	12:22:52 PM	Allegro 2mm Cosine	255267	2136860	2137	438.69	81915.93	22.61
11/13/2003	12:24:11 PM	Allegro 4mm Cosine	211002	1766320	1766	438.69	68308.14	22.34
11/13/2003	12:30:23 PM	Allegro 6mm Cosine	149187	1248860	1249	440.47	48042.42	22.39
11/13/2003	12:40:00 PM	Allegro 8mm Cosine	86114	720866	721	440.47	28131.62	22.2
11/13/2003	12:43:02 PM	Allegro 10mm Cosine	62618	524180	524	440.47	20774.24	21.95
11/13/2003	2:56:22 PM	LEDemetron 0mm Cosine (8mm tip)	188719	1579780	1580	453.25	55174.59	24.86
11/13/2003	4:17:58 PM	LEDemetron 2mm Cosine (8mm tip)	176191	1474910	1475	453.25	51724.84	24.67
11/13/2003	4:29:59 PM	LEDemetron 4mm Cosine (8mm tip)	110872	928118	928	454.32	32969.58	24.32
11/13/2003	4:30:41 PM	LEDemetron 6mm Cosine (8mm tip)	66741	558694	559	454.32	20324.88	24.09
11/14/2003	10:19:05 AM	LEDemetron 8mm Cosine(8mm tip)	36237	303341	303	453.25	11332.93	23.94
11/14/2003	10:26:36 AM	LEDemetron 10mm Cosine (8mm tip)	18396	153996	154	454.32	5929.78	22.43
11/13/2003	4:49:17 PM	LEDemetron 0mm Cosine #2 (8mm tip)	190676	1596160	1596	453.25	54515.59	25.33
11/13/2003	4:58:57 PM	LEDemetron 2mm Cosine #2 (8mm tip)	190844	1597570	1598	453.25	56165.05	24.69
11/13/2003	5:23:38 PM	LEDemetron 4mm Cosine #2 (8mm tip)	115963	970733	971	454.32	34097	24.6
11/14/2003	10:13:28 AM	LEDemetron 6mm Cosine (8mm tip)	66824	559390	559	453.25	20487.79	23.78
11/14/2003	10:19:05 AM	LEDemetron 8mm Cosine #2 (8mm tip)	36237	303341	303	453.25	11332.93	23.94
11/14/2003	10:28:11 AM	LEDemetron 10mm Cosine #2 (8mm tip)	17947	150233	150	454.32	5864.72	22.47
11/14/2003	11:21:38 AM	Flashlite 1001 0mm Cosine	81330	680821	681	465.28	24134.9	24.4
11/14/2003	11:25:16 AM	Flashlite 1001 2mm Cosine	66112	553427	553	465.28	19743.74	24.45
11/14/2003	11:28:49 AM	Flashlite 1001 4mm Cosine	42305	354141	354	465.28	12978.1	24.06
11/14/2003	11:32:42 AM	Flashlite 1001 6mm Cosine	32476	271855	272	465.28	10022.17	24.17
11/14/2003	11:36:50 AM	Flashlite 1001 8mm Cosine	22234	186118	186	465.28	7090.57	23.71
11/14/2003	11:41:18 AM	Flashlite 1001 10mm Cosine	17305	144863	145	465.28	5600.43	23.39
11/14/2003	4:02:25 PM	Allegro 0mm Cosine	168710	1412280	1412	443.67	52576.88	23.53
11/14/2003	3:40:47 PM	Allegro 2mm Cosine	224282	1877480	1877	443.67	69844.88	23.35
11/14/2003	3:44:23 PM	Allegro 4mm Cosine	184282	1542640	1543	443.67	57557.02	23.36
11/14/2003	3:50:22 PM	Allegro 6mm Cosine	132681	1110680	1111	443.67	41738.62	23.21
11/14/2003	3:55:58 PM	Allegro 8mm Cosine	86001	719919	720	444.02	27388.65	23.03
11/14/2003	3:59:20 PM	Allegro 10mm Cosine	59328	496637	497	444.02	19171.72	22.91
			0mm	1412	1580	681		
			2mm	1877	1475	553		
			4mm	1543	928	354		
			6mm	1111	559	272		
			8mm	720	303	186		
			10mm	497	154	145		

See Figure 10.

Each of the above described multi-piece tip designs provide more light in a more uniform pattern.

EXAMPLE 1

It has been demonstrated that light intensity (mW/cm2) disperses rapidly with distance from these light sources. The exit angle of the light as it leaves the light source contributes greatly to this. As the beam spread increases the light loses intensity rapidly. This is clinically significant to the practicing dentist and their patients. The bottom floor of a

typical preparation may be a minimum of 2mm deep or more. If the light intensity is too low at the bottom of the filling the composite material may not receive enough energy to adequately cure. Even if the composite is placed directly on the surface of the tooth the dentist holds the distal end of the light guide approximately 2mm away to keep the composite from adhering to it. The clinical advantage of the present invention is that the light intensity (mW/cm^2) increases at 2mm away from the surface and stays higher as distance increases. This facilitates complete curing of the composite. The results of this experiment can be seen in FIG. 10.

EXAMPLE 2

The effect of light collimation with an embodiment of the instant invention (identified in FIG. 11 as “Allegro”) on a composite (Heliomolar) that is hard to cure is shown in the FIG 11. FIG. 11 also compares the embodiment of the instant invention to the other 3 best LED-curing lights on the market. The instant invention is clearly superior. The composite was cured at a distance of 6mm. See FIG. 12. The vertical axis shows the hardness value. Knoop Hardness (KHN) is considered, by academics, the most accurate test of composite hardness. Greater hardness means the composite has polymerized to a greater degree. This improves strength and wear and decreases the likelihood of sensitivity. The bottom of the sample is actually 8mm away from the distal end of the tip.

The foregoing detailed description has been given for clearness of understanding only and no unnecessary limitations should be understood there from as modifications will be obvious to skilled in the art.

While the invention has been described in connection with specific embodiments thereof, it will be understood that it is capable of further modifications and this application is intended to cover any variations, uses, or adaptations of the invention following, in general, the principles of the invention and including such departures from the present disclosure as come within known or customary practice within the art to which the invention pertains and as may be applied to the essential features hereinbefore set forth and as follows in the scope of the appended claims.